

**NEWS
RELEASE**

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**USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
“HELPING PEOPLE HELP THE LAND”**

CONTACT:

**Perry Stevens
Public Affairs Specialist
615-277-2533**

or

**Mike Hansbrough
NRCS Biologist
731-668-0700 EXT 112**

**QUAIL UNLIMITED EXTENDS BUFFER INCENTIVE
TO WEST TENNESSEE COUNTIES**

The Tennessee Quail Unlimited State Council (TNQU) is paying a one-time \$50 per acre incentive payment on selected native grass buffers established on row cropland. Practices eligible for the extra incentive (above the existing USDA payments and incentives) include Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) CP33 Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds, native grass CP21 Filter Strips, and CP22 Riparian Forest Buffer native grass Zone 3 acres. The incentives were previously available in middle Tennessee counties but have now been extended to all counties west of and including Clay, Jackson, Putnam, White, Van Buren, Grundy and Franklin.

The additional monies were made available through a grant provided by the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), working in cooperation with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Quail Unlimited, Inc. Several QU chapters have also provided funding to allow the incentives to be offered.

TNQU funds available for the \$50 incentives are limited, and will be obligated on a first-come, first-served basis until December 31, 2006, or earlier if funds are exhausted. To be eligible for the Quail Unlimited incentive payment, landowners must first apply for CRP buffers at the Farm Service Agency (FSA) office. Once the offer has been accepted by USDA and a contract signed, the TNQU incentive funds will be paid. Acres already enrolled in these practices, prior to November 1, 2006, are not eligible for the TNQU incentive.

Currently, the USDA is in a continuous signup for CRP buffer practices. This type of USDA signup allows landowners to enroll land automatically into the CRP program without a competitive bid process if certain land eligibility criteria are met. CP33 Habitat Buffers are native grass field borders that are established around the perimeter of cropland fields. Filter strips are grass strips that are established on the edge of cropped areas adjacent to streams and rivers. Riparian Forest Buffers are made up of trees, shrubs, and a native grass strip adjacent to the streams and rivers.

While enrolled in CRP, landowners also receive USDA annual payments per acre and cost-share payments for establishing these buffer practices. In addition, USDA currently has Signing Incentive Payments (SIP) for the mentioned CRP practices of \$100 per acre, so landowners taking advantage of the TNQU incentive would receive combined incentive payments of \$150 per acre enrolled. The USDA and TNQU SIP payments are made to the landowner once the contract has been signed.

Native warm season grasses eligible for the TNQU incentive payment include switchgrass, big bluestem, little bluestem, sideoats grama, and indiagrass, with some legumes included. These grasses and forbs offer excellent habitat to a wide range of wildlife, especially ground nesting birds like the northern bobwhite, wild turkey, and some songbirds. "Buffers planted to native grasses are one of the simplest things landowners could do to help quail and rabbits make a comeback," said Mike Hansbrough, Area Biologist with the USDA-NRCS. "We are already seeing it in some west Tennessee areas where landowner participation is good."

"Quail Unlimited is committed to helping the TWRA, USDA, and other agencies improve habitat for quail across the state, and we feel our incentive payments are one way to help landowners put habitat on the ground," noted Tony Phillips, TNQU State Council Chairman.

Since the TNQU incentive funding is limited, landowners are encouraged to apply immediately through their local USDA Service Center. For more information, contact Mike Hansbrough, USDA-NRCS Biologist (731-668-0700 EXT 112), or Mark Gudlin, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (615-781-6614), or visit www.TWRPrivatelands.org.

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